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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/08/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KCOR](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: AWADALLAH FACES MORE HITS FROM THE RUMOR MILL

REF: A. AMMAN 2671
[B](#). AMMAN 1984
[C](#). AMMAN 1923 (NOTAL)
[D](#). AMMAN 1731
[E](#). AMMAN 1455

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Royal Court Chief Bassem Awadallah, long an object of anti-Palestinian, anti-reformist anger and resentment, is facing yet another round of malicious gossip and slander designed to compel his ouster. This time, the allegations focus on a guilt-by-association link between Awadallah and a trafficking in persons case (Ref A). Despite the fact that Awadallah's links to the company named in the case are tenuous at best, the East Banker tribal conservative campaign of character assassination continues. The attacks on Awadallah are aimed at his image rather than his policies, but in the end the accumulation of smears continues to chip away at Awadallah's job security. End Summary.

Non-Scandal Number One - Trafficking in Persons

[1](#)2. (SBU) On September 3, MP and outspoken gadfly Nariman Al-Rousan called on the government to make public the identities of the Jordanians involved in a trafficking-in-persons case which is currently being adjudicated in a California court (ref A). The case involves a Jordanian company, Daoud and Partners, which is allegedly owned by a distant relative of Awadallah. Not impeded by the tenuousness of the link, Rousan implied that Awadallah was involved in the trafficking of Nepalese workers to Iraq and demanded that the government "reveal the truth behind this serious issue that has preoccupied the mind of the public and harmed Jordan's reputation abroad." After Rousan's statements, the Union of Professional Associations announced that it was forming a committee to investigate the case, with a focus on Jordanians who may be "seeking to stockpile wealth" -- a coded reference to Awadallah's fortune, which he obtained during a brief stint away from government.

[1](#)3. (C) On September 4, journalist Nahid Hatter, during an appearance on a popular talk show, accused Awadallah by name of being a symbol of corruption. Hatter also trotted out Awadallah's personal wealth, with the implication that it was obtained through corrupt means. Hatter claimed that Awadallah was a mere JD 600 (USD 840) per month public servant in the Prime Ministry in 1990, but is now a man with a JD 11 million (USD 15.4 million) mansion. Hatter called on the Jordanian public to push for Awadallah's resignation. Kwala Hassan, a TIP advisor to the Ministry of Labor, subsequently told Poloff that Hatter is filing a lawsuit against Awadallah for tarnishing the image of Jordan. Hassan also mentioned rumors are circulating that Awadallah is planning to leave Jordan for Dubai.

Awadallah's Explanation

14. (C) During a September 8 meeting with the Ambassador, Awadallah explained that he had not maintained a financial interest in the country for more than ten years. Awadallah said that he and his brother started a sandwich shop together in 1997. After the failure of that venture, his brother took ownership of the company and started a travel agency. On September 8, AFP confirmed that Awadallah had sold his shares in the company in 1998, according to publicly available records.

Non-Scandal Number Two - A Palestinian "Understanding"

15. (U) On September 12, Foreign Minister Salah Al-Bashir appeared before reporters to tamp down a conspiracy theory that had been circling in the media about a secret deal, unfavorable to Jordan, reached between Awadallah and Palestinian Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat. Rumor had it that the two had signed a written understanding. "There is no truth to reports of such a document," Bashir explained. "The Foreign Ministry is aware of absolutely everything pertaining to Jordanian politics. Anyone who thinks that the Palestinian cause will be resolved at Jordan's expense is delusional."

Comment

16. (S) These allegations are just the latest attempts by the conservative establishment to find a scandal that will stick to the Royal Court Chief. The summer furor over land deals (itself a mask for criticism of Awadallah-inspired economic liberalization) was a significant uptick in these efforts (Refs C-E). When that debate was effectively quashed by the King (Ref B), Awadallah's critics were left searching for new ammunition -- conveniently provided by the trafficking scandal. The not-so-subtle implication that Awadallah cannot be trusted on national security because of his Palestinian origins further plays on East Banker political reflexes. In addition to his Palestinian origins, Awadallah's bank account and perceived haughtiness are considered fair game. With his views on economic reform, although politically unpopular, recognized as having the King and government's backing, ad hominem sniping at Awadallah's is the most effective arrow the East Banker tribal conservatives have in their quiver. The question going forward is which attack on Awadallah's reputation will finally transform him, in the King's eyes, from an asset to a liability.
Beecroft